

VZCZCXRO4027  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHMOS  
DE RUEHGB #0432/01 0440337  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 130337Z FEB 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2653  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000432

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2026  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: INITIAL REACTION TO JAFARI NOMINATION: MUTED  
ENTHUSIASM

REF: A. BAGHDAD 374  
[B](#). BAGHDAD 402

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555) February 12 voted 64-63 to renominate incumbent Ibrahim Jafari as Prime Minister. Jafari was supported by his Dawa Party, Dawa Tanzim, the Sadrists, and some independents in the Coalition. Jafari's challenger, Deputy President Adil Abd al-Mahdi, got the support of SCIRI, the Badr Organization, the Fadhila Party, and the majority of the Coalition independents. Two other challengers, Fadhila Party's Nadeem al-Jabiri and independent Hussein Shahrastani, dropped out of the race prior to the vote. By delivering the nomination to Jafari, Moqtada Sadr's party has increased its status within the Shia coalition. Abd al-Mahdi's SCIRI, still the largest party in UIC 555, will likely to seek to keep its current ministries, particularly the Ministry of Interior. SCIRI leader Abd al-Hakim will seek to retain his position as head of Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555). The Fadhila Party and the independents who supported Abd al-Mahdi must also struggle to find their place in the new government, as they can no longer rely on Abd al-Mahdi's patronage to secure the positions they desired. The Kurds and Sunni Arabs were not enthused about the Shia decision. Jafari has much work ahead to build a coalition government with them. End Summary.

-----  
Jafari's Stubbornness Pays Off  
-----

[1](#)2. (U) PM Jafari of the Dawa al-Islamiya Party survived a tough struggle against Adil Abd al-Mahdi of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic in Iraq (SCIRI) to win renomination for Prime Minister. At a meeting in a mosque near SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim's Baghdad compound, UIC Council of Representatives members voted 64-63 to nominate Jafari. Dawa, Dawa Tanzim, Sadr supporters and a handful of independents gave Jafari his majority, while SCIRI/Badr, Fadhila, and the bulk of UIC independents cast their votes for Abd al-Mahdi.

[1](#)3. (C) Shia independent Taha Der'a al-Saadi told PolOff February 12 that SCIRI and Badr Organization members were outwardly happy after the vote was announced and that al-Hakim and Abd al-Mahdi were the first to congratulate Jafari after his victory. After the election, List 555 leaders appeared at a press conference and talked about party unity and the need to move Iraq forward. Even Ayad Allawi stalwart Safiya Suhail al-Tamimi told Poloff she was impressed by the way the losers in today's election appeared gracious in front of the cameras.

14. (C) The other two candidates early on in the process -- independent hard-line and TNA Deputy Speaker Islamist Hussein Shahrستاني and former Baghdad University professor Nadeem al-Jabiri of the Fadhila party -- dropped out in the days before the vote after receiving assurances that if they voted for Abd al-Mahdi, they would get a Deputy President and a Deputy Speaker position, respectively. With Jafari's victory, all deals SCIRI was offering are now off.

-----  
Sadrists Major Force  
-----

15. (C) By delivering decisive support to Jafari, the Sadrists have, at least for the near term, increased their standing within the List 555 coalition. At a minimum, we expect the Sadrists to increase the number of service ministries they control. The Sadrists may also initially demand that Jafari not allow Ayad Allawi into the government. President Jalal Talabani announced February 12 that the Kurdistan Alliance would not support the new government unless Allawi's party was included in the government. Jafari may finally press the Sadrists to back off in order to form a government, since he needs additional support for his coalition government. Owing his premiership to this staunch Sadrist backing, we can expect Jafari to oppose or at least seek to stall any Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) action against the Sadrist-backed Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM).

-----  
Whither SCIRI?

BAGHDAD 00000432 002 OF 003

-----  
16. (C) Having lost the PM race, SCIRI will likely seek to increase its ministerial positions, while holding on to key portfolios such as the Ministry of Interior. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Deputy Foreign Minister for Bilateral Affairs Dr. Hamid al-Bayati told PolOff February 12 that he was extremely disappointed in the results of the vote. He said he expects Abd al-Mahdi will remain Deputy President and that SCIRI will retain control of the Ministry of Interior (MoI), in addition to seeking other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Ministry of Oil (MoO). Some of the technocrats who had come to surround Abd al-Mahdi might find themselves elevated to ministerial rank, instead of being in the kitchen cabinet of an Abd al-Mahdi premiership that is not to be.

17. (C) If SCIRI retains control of MoI, we expect it to put Bayan Jabr's name forward to continue as minister, or to at least use him as a bargaining chip. Neither the Sunni Arabs nor Allawi are likely to join a government with Jabr at MOI. Once they make their position clear, SCIRI could seek to slip in a "compromise" candidate such as Qassim Daoud, hoping that he would face less opposition if presented as an alternative to Jabr.

18. (C) Former Oil Minister Thamer Ghadban, however, wondered aloud to PolOff on February 12 whether SCIRI would stay in the Shia Islamist coalition. Withdrawing from it would risk incurring the wrath of Sayyid Muhammad Ridha al-Sistani, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's son. While a split is unlikely, SCIRI may try to engineer a vote of no confidence against Jafari in the future. It would take only 138 votes to bring down the government, and the Kurds, Allawi and the Sunnis have nearly that on their own without SCIRI prodding them forward.

-----  
Fadhila: The Would-Be Giant  
-----

¶9. (C) After campaigning for the premiership himself, Nadeem al-Jabiri was able to strike a deal with Abd al-Mahdi to become Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives in exchange for supporting Abd al-Mahdi's candidacy. Abd al-Mahdi also offered Fadhila control of two ministries. Under PM Jafari, Fadhila can reasonably expect one ministry. Nadeem al-Jabiri's fate remains uncertain, but he may have to resign himself to being a UIC backbencher in the Council.

¶10. (C) Potential Interior Minister Qassim Daoud told PolOff on February 12 that while most Fadhila Party members voted for Abd al-Mahdi, some may have cut a deal with Jafari so that Fadhila can retain control over the Ministry of Oil. On the other hand, as Ghadban told PolOffs and EconOff today, Fadhila's performance in the Oil Ministry to date has been so dismal that there will be strong voices calling for the Oil Ministry to go to someone else, with Ghadban himself the most likely alternative.

-----  
How the Independents Voted  
-----

¶11. (C) The independents did not vote as a bloc. Taha Der'a al-Saadi told PolOff on February 12 that Shahrستاني, after withdrawing from the PM race in favor of Abd al-Mahdi, could not persuade the independents to cast their votes for Abd al-Mahdi. Our best estimate of the secret ballot is that about 18 independents voted for Abd al-Mahdi and 12 voted for Jafari. At this time it is unclear if any side deals were made; we may be able to deduce this once candidates for the ministries are announced.

-----  
Kurds Divided Over Outcome  
-----

¶12. (C) PM Jafari and President Talabani's relationship, never very close to begin with, has becoming increasingly strained in recent months with their private arguments often spilling over into the public sphere. We can expect this to continue, assuming both are returned to their current positions. President Talabani evinced no great enthusiasm with the Ambassador February 12 (septel). Even Masoud Barzani's KDP will now probably support increased Presidential powers for rival Talabani, in part to pressure Jafari on key issues for the Kurds such as Kirkuk, regional control over natural resources, and

BAGHDAD 00000432 003 OF 003

protecting the Constitution's provisions on federalism. (COMMENT: Barzani previously told the Ambassador that if SCIRI candidate Adil Abd al-Mahdi became the Shia nominee, that the KDP would not support Talabani's renomination for President, fearing that Abd al-Mahdi and Talabani's close relationship would give Barzani's rival too much power in Baghdad. END COMMENT.)

-----  
Sunni Arabs Disappointed  
-----

¶13. (C) Sunni National Dialogue Council figure Abd al-Nasser al-Janabi predicted to PolOff February 12 that a weak Jafari may have difficulty getting his programs passed in the Council of Representatives. Janabi said he would have preferred Nadeem al-Jabiri as the PM. His second choice was Abd al-Mahdi because he expected that Abd al-Mahdi would have moved against Hakim if he was PM. Moreover, Jafari, with his ties to the Sadrists, is just as bad as Abd al-Mahdi with Iran, al-Janabi opined. Separately, Professor Hassan al-Bazzaz, political advisor to Adnan Dulaimi's Gathering of the Iraqi People, also called the Jafari nomination bad news, "worse" than Abd al-

Mahdi. Jafari, he told Poloff February 12, was a disaster as PM when he had the full backing of both the Kurds and the Shia. Bazzaz wondered what he could do from a weaker political position. The Sunnis, with a weak PM, will now seek more assurances, in terms of getting their people into key ministries. Both Janabi and Bazzaz conceded that Jafari's views on federalism are better than Abd al-Mahdi's but they both would have preferred the pragmatic Abd al-Mahdi to Jafari.

-----  
The Scorecard  
-----

¶14. (C) According to our information, the support for each candidate was as follows:

63 For DP Mahdi:

15 SCIRI  
15 Badr  
15 Fadhila  
18 Independents

64 For PM Jafari:

12 Dawa  
13 Dawa Tanzim  
27 Sadrists  
12 Independents

Sadrism Hassan Tuma was not present for the vote, but most likely would have voted for Jafari.

-----  
Comment  
-----

¶15. (C) Comment: Despite Jafari's dismal track record as Prime Minister (ref b), he was able to pull together enough votes to win renomination. One bright side of the day was that the Shia Coalition resolved a gridlock with a democratic election. Much of the problem with Iraqi governing processes to date has been the unwillingness to put issues to a vote and move on. Whether this outcome will be seen as beneficial is still an open question to the Iraqi political class. Also, the closeness of the vote underscores the tensions within the Shia List 555; we are hearing some political wags wonder if some of the List 555 members might not join in an anti-Jafari coalition. Jafari has far to go to unite List 555 behind him, bring in the Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Allawi, and form a true national unity government. End Comment.  
KHALILZAD